

Message Text

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14

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EB-07 COME-00 ABF-01 TRSE-00 OMB-01

ITC-01 STR-04 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 CIEP-01 /033 W

----- 086544

R 020930Z MAR 76

FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7764

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EFIN, ETRN, PBOR, IS, JO

SUBJECT: WEST BANKERS PROTEST ISRAELI TRAVEL TAX

REF: TEL AVIV 1141

1. SUMMARY. WEST BANK TRAVEL AGENTS DECIDED FEB 28 TO REFUSE TO SELL TICKETS SUBJECT TO ISRAELI TRAVEL TAX TO WEST BANKERS, AS PROTEST AGAINST RECENT EXTENSION OF SUCH TAX TO RESIDENTS OF OCCUPIED TERRITORY. COURT CHALLENGE ALSO BEING CONTEMPLATED. END SUMMARY.

2. FEB 29 JERUSALEM POST REPORTED WEST BANK AND GAZA TRAVEL AGENTS HAD DECIDED "TO SUSPEND OPERATIONS IN PROTEST AGAINST THE IMPOSITION OF THE TRAVEL TAX" ON RESIDENTS OF WEST BANK (AND GAZA). WE UNDERSTAND THEIR DECISION WAS TAKEN AT MEETING OF WEST BANK ASSOCIATION OF TOURIST AND TRAVEL AGENTS HELD IN RAMALLAH ON FEB 28. POST FURTHER STATED TRAVEL AGENTS PLANNED TO SOLICIT HELP OF WEST BANK MAYORS IN APPROACHING GOI THROUGH MILGOVT TO HAVE TAX RESCINDED. ARABI DAILY AL QUDDS HAD EARLIER REPORTED SIMILAR PROTEST TO MILITARY GOVERNOR BY

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ASSOCIATION OF WEST BANK CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE.

3. ARAB TRAVEL AGENTS HAVE TOLD US SUSPENSION OF OPERATIONS IS LIMITED TO REFUSAL TO SELL TICKETS TO WEST BANKERS (AND GAZANS) SUBJECT TO TRAVEL TAX, I.E. FOR DEPARTURE THROUGH EXIT POINTS IN ISRAEL PROPER. THESE AGENTS ARE CONTINUING ALL OTHER TRAVEL AND TOURIST SERVICES, INCLUDING SALE OF TICKETS IN FOREIGN CURRENCY ON WHICH TRAVEL TAX IS NOT LEVIED. ANY RESIDENT OF ISRAEL OR OCCUPIED TERRITORIES HOLDING PASSPORT OTHER THAN ISRAELI OR JORDANIAN IS ELIGIBLE TO BUY TICKET IN FOREIGN CURRENCY, ACCORDING TO OUR SOURCES.

4. DECISION TO SUSPEND SERVICES PARTIALLY WAS DESCRIBED BY OUR CONTACTS AS FORMALIZATION OF WHAT HAD BEEN INFORMAL PRACTICE OF WEST BANK TRAVEL AGENTS SINCE NEW GOI MEASURE WENT INTO EFFECT FEB 15. INITIALLY THIS INFORMAL POLICY WAS CHIEFLY RESULT OF TRAVEL AGENTS' CONFUSION AS TO HOW TO IMPLEMENT NEW GOI MEASURES, AND DESIRE ON THEIR PART TO AWAIT RESULTS OF INITIAL PROTESTS TO MILGOVT AND GOI. NOW, HOWEVER, THEY HAD DECIDED TO TAKE ACTION AS FORM OF OPEN PROTEST. SOURCES SAID TRAVEL AGENTS' ASSOCIATION IS ALSO CONSULTING WB ATTORNEY WITH VIEW TO POSSIBLY CHALLENGING GOI MEASURES IN COURTS, ON GROUNDS OCCUPYING POWER NOT PERMITTED UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW TO ALTER PREVAILING LAW EXCEPT FOR PURPOSES OF SECURITY. THEY ARGUE WEST BANKERS SHOULD BE TREATED AS TRANSIT PASSENGERS WHEN DEPARTING FROM ISRAELI PORTS OR AIRPORT.

5. COMMENT: TRAVEL AGENTS WITH WHOM WE HAVE TALKED ARE NOT SANGUINE THAT LUMP SUM TRAVEL TAX AND CONCOMITANT 15 PERCENT LEVIES ON PRICE OF TECKET AND FOREIGN CURRENCY ALLOTMENT WOULD BE RESCINDED FOR WEST BANKERS. THEY APPEAR DETERMINED, HOWEVER, TO PRESS CHALLENGE OF GOI MEASURES AND TO CONTINUE THEIR REFUSAL TO SELL TAXABLE TICKETS, AT LEAST UNTIL ALL AVENUES OF PROTEST HAVE BEEN EXHAUSTED. EFFECTIVENESS OF PROTEST DUBIOUS, SINCE WEST BANK RESIDENTS CAN EITHER CROSS JORDAN RIVER BRIDGES AND DEPART VIA AMMAN OR PURCHASE TICKETS DIRECTLY FROM CARRIERS OR THROUGH ISRAELI TRAVEL AGENTS AND PAY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TAX. TAX HAS, OF COURSE, LONG BEEN APPLICABLE TO EAST JERUSALEM RESIDENTS, SINCE GOI CONSIDERS ALL OF JERUSALEM INTEGRAL PART OF ISRAEL, NOT "ADMINISTERED TERROROTY."
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: WEST BANK, EXPORT SUBSIDIES, PASSENGER TAXES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 02 MAR 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: morefirh
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976JERUSA00294
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760079-0051
From: JERUSALEM
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t197603105/aaaadojs.tel
Line Count: 112
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 TEL AVIV 1141
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: morefirh
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 14 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <14 JUN 2004 by GarlanWA>; APPROVED <07 JUL 2004 by morefirh>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: WEST BANKERS PROTEST ISRAELI TRAVEL TAX
TAGS: EFIN, ETRN, PBOR, IS, JO
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006